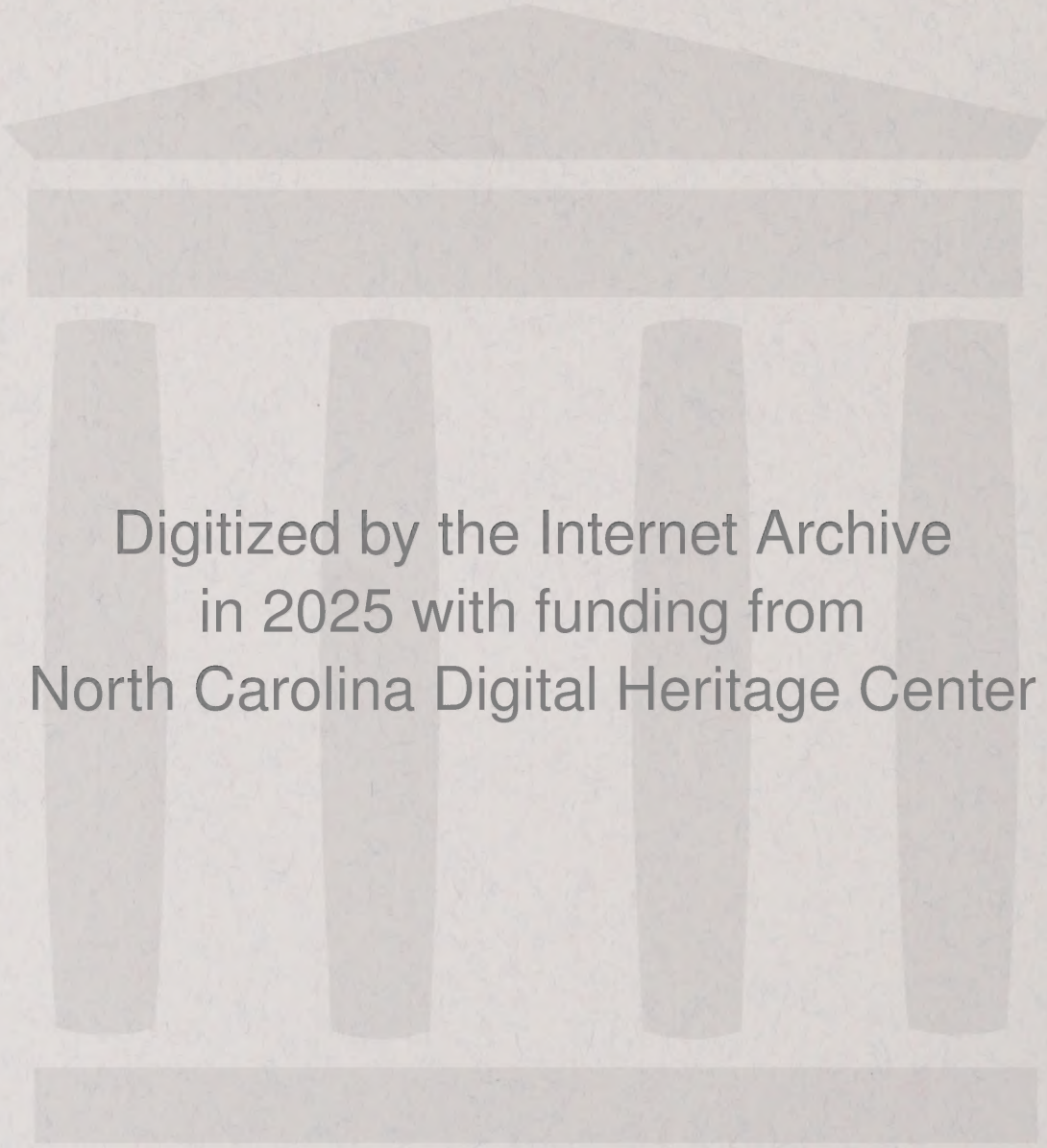
SIGNET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SIGNET

THE LITERARY MAGAZINE OF QUEENS COLLEGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

3	REQUIEM	BROOKE ALBERT
3	(AM THOUGHTS)	CHED LOHR
4	THE BURNING OF MY MOTHER'S SUITCASE	TISHANI DOSHI
6	BED POEM #2	DANIEL LUNSFORD
7	CHEAP DATE	INGRID JUNGERMANN
8	BITS AND PIECES 20-21	JACKIE MONTGOMERY
9	UNTITLED	TISHANI DOSHI
10	DISTURBANCE	CHED LOHR
12	REMEMBERING HOW TO DIE	TISHANI DOSHI
16	PLEASE PASS THE SPICE OF LIFE	BROOKE ALBERT
18	GIVING BLOOD	INGRID JUNGERMANN
20	WHEN LUCY HAS AN AFFAIR WITH PROFESSOR FORESTER AND MISS ELLIE ATTENDS THE OIL BARON'S BALL	MEREDITH MALKMUS
22	MUSINGS ON WINSLOW HOMER'S PAINTING OF A WOMAN AND AN OCEAN	ASHLEY CAPPS
24	DESHAWN	JACKIE MONTGOMERY
25	SPARK AN UNLINED RETREAT	KATHERINE FURLER
26	TRIFE LIFE	JACKIE MONTGOMERY

PROSE

13	A CERTAIN LIGHT	ASHLEY CAPPS

ARTWORK

5	AGED	PATRICK MORGAN
11	8ème ETAGE	LARA DAVIS
17	SATURDAY	BROOKS THOMAS
19	CLARE & MIKE	MATT HESLIN
23	UNTITLED	AMY BACHE
27	FIVE O'CLOCK, TUESDAY AFTERNOON	LARA DAVIS

requiem

i remember
catching caterpillars
and fireflies
chasing the flickering tails
and the creeping fuzz

i furnished the visitors
with a world of glass
all their own
where i could still watch
and wonder at their charms

the brown, black
yellow and orange
flamboyant
in their tapestry patterns
the luxurious fur
and gleaming obsidian

a night's sleep
brings the solemnity
of morning
brooke albert

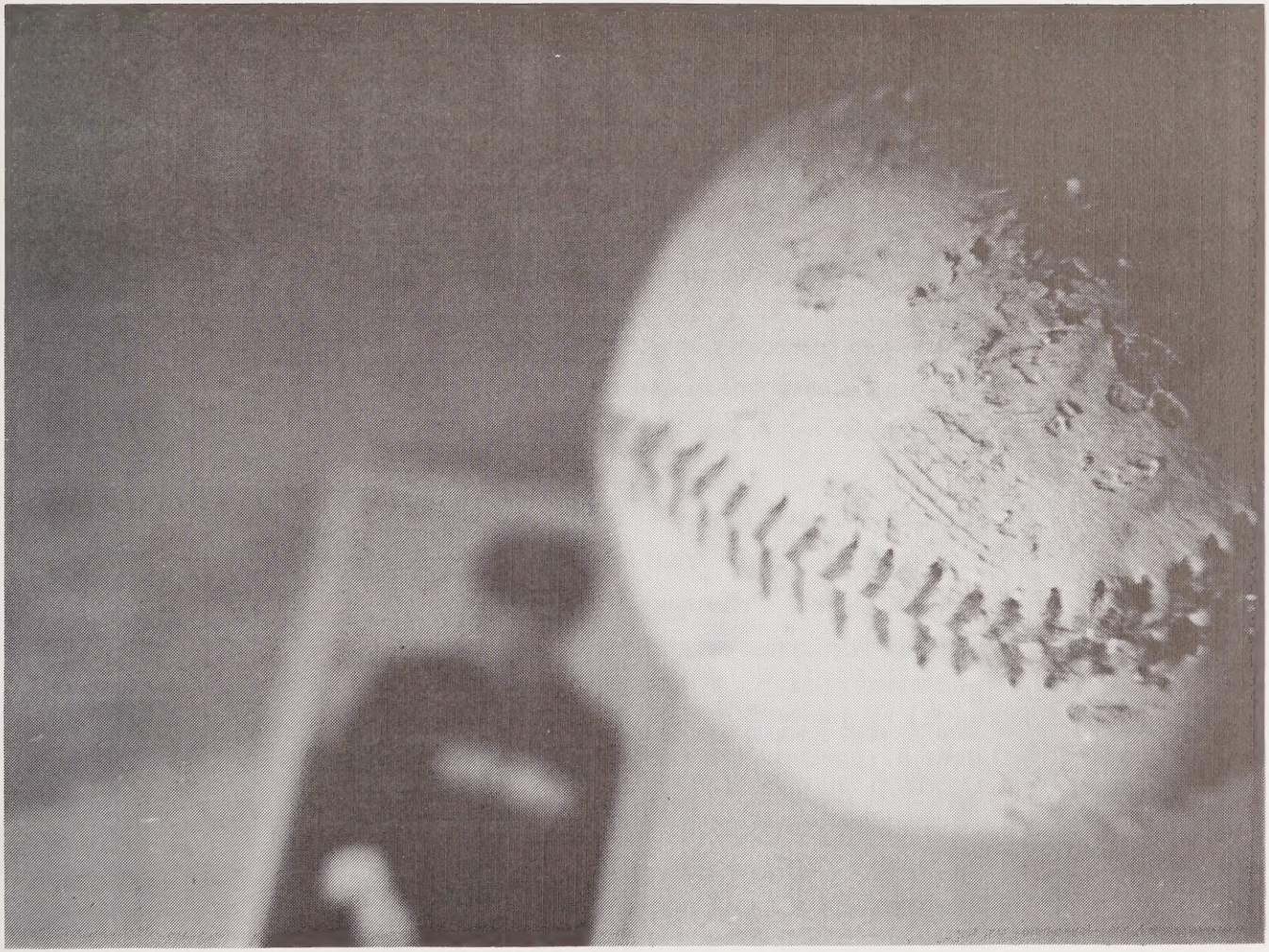
(am thoughts) am7 9.5.96 A powerful storm was predicted. I was outside

The Burning of My Mother's Suitcase

Those letters and things of the past
love charms – blue ribbons
A wine cork of wilder times
Shirts of eighteen and sunbathing in yellow swimsuits
her friend in polka dots
pictures from before she became my mother
running in the snow
after TV finished and there was only dark
in the classic collector
suitcase of possessions
recollection of what she used to be
when she trusted everyone
before marriage
before India
before they took her life in objects
and burned them
because it became too tedious
carrying around all that stuff
like a bag full of serpents
warning
all these are just things
old things and dangerous
so far away. Where newness surrounds the strange
why care for the past?
dead things
In flames. I'm sure my mother cried
We care for old things the same.

Tishani Doshi

watching the dark clouds convert the peaceful colors of dusk into a different



Aged gelatin silver print *Patrick Morgan*

Bed Poem #2

We lay in the bed where last night I lied,
And now all I once said is gilded sentiment --
Doubtful in your eyes.

No more to rest; cupable under the sheets
And my thoughts become tender
As I pay for my proceedings.

Mercuric pleasure sprung forth from my untruth,
Even as I crossed the great bird that would soon bring regret.
But that offense shall never alter my affinity
(For a lie is only immediate).

And so now I walk beside myself
Weighing my logic against the water --
All the while salvaging my merit
As I resolve
Never to lie in my bed again.

Daniel Lunsford

Cheap Date

The road is his favorite whore
Quick fix with a stickshift;
Ashtray open, cigarette
Butts wet with three different flavors
Of lipstick
All from different counties states cities
Lost and loved and left
Field from pretty. He leaves
His mark on tarred
Pavements with a squeal
And a jerk,
Popping her into gear
Sliding into first,
And there she is
On top and underneath
Breathing the same slow breaths
He's breathing
Offering him a drag
And he knows she's teasing. A road
Hath no friend
No pimp no rule no gunshot start
No checker-flagged end
She is done
By every Don or Dame that pays
To lay
The road is his favorite whore
Because she never wants to stay.

Ingrid Jungermann

called 911 after seeing a man stumble down 7th street before collapsing by the

Bits and Pieces 20–21

It was more than a book
the frayed multicolored
covers reminded
me of
mom's
patched black &
yellow
afghan,
my address is in
both covers.

Not filled with
a little
girl's
dreams, baby
dolls
having Barbie's
hair -- even though I'm
other--
but
a young
woman's love
hopes and fears -- almost
two years' worth.

At first I
felt part of
this life
was
forever
misplaced,
no,
only a record of
life's points
and penalties.

Two teen girls
remove its
worn
thickness from
the brown mesh
on the back of the
train,
and giggle.

I see the forty-something
man's
erection
at descriptions
of
enticing sex
acts
and the old
woman's
raised brow, but she
understands
the vehement curses
against pain
and a love
so strong for
others
it *is* risky.

They all put it back though.
Keeping it would be too
wrong
and
sending it
would make
me
too
real.

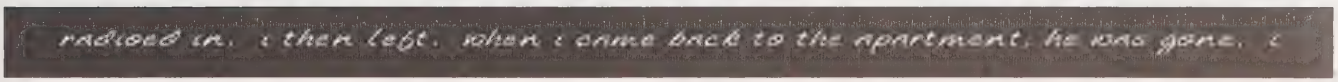
Jackie Montgomery

side of the road. the police came, stayed with the man who asked for help, and

Untitled

Last night I could only cry
as you talked about that lonely Christmas
when we rolled in a bed with no sheets
walked down to the A&P for some microwavable rice
that would somehow remind us of home.
Something off the streets -- in the warmth, like we owned the place.
But this plastic blue iguana's bowl
that used to hold broccoli
now holding our connection to familiar things
brought out every moment of sadness
I've replayed -- remembering
the first time I had lain with a man for weeks
with a broken TV and four blurry channels
your silver car that didn't move
and could have taken us places where love could grow
instead of being stifled by the cold
the lack of sheets
and me clinging to you
as if you were home.

Tishani Doshi



Disturbance

I couldn't sleep in the alcohol plagued
woman's flat,
left at four-thirty in the morning
to walk the streets and
sort my mind.
An intensity from the images
of a guy looking for screens
to leave
and smoke,
women on the streets
who knew the word "sex" in several languages
and were ready to sell.
A pay phone presented only
a concerned voice,
five thousand miles away.
I walked down towards Charles Bridge
only to see another drunk woman
being escorted home a man
angered by her wrecklessness.
She collapsed onto the worn sidewalk,
he kept walking in green confusion.
The Charles was also sleepless.
People walked by, maybe going home,
maybe calling it a night or a new day.
The darkness faded with the rising sun.
One ferry streamed beneath the rapid waters.
I slowly retreated towards the flat
to a sickened woman
and a best friend.

Ched Lohr

8ème etage gelatin silver print *Lara Davis*

Remembering how to die

When my cousin remembered her past life
she talked about death and her other mother.

And all the holy man said came true after all.

We had found him
how they told us in books he would sit
yoga position, snake braids and ash on feet
and as he told us that children sometimes suffer
when they remember how to die
his words fell soft, gentle, and moderate
just like his religion told him to do.

My mother and I crossed the road once
and our hands were full
from shopping
every Tuesday

With his alms for free
the old man continued with chants and sacred water
that was meant to free the older spirit
back to the broken cycle
from the body that now belonged
to my four-year-old cousin.

This home doesn't look like mine
I used to have other toys,
other friends, in that other place

And I used to run like wind . . . all the time
That day with the truck, I ran again.

He took his hand with the crinkled life line
and blessed the brow of my worried aunt
telling her that in time her child would forget
how it was to live in that other world
that we leave behind when we are born again.
And my aunt, being a holy woman
found a way in prayers to stop the tears
that this second daughter brought

when she remembered death
and asked for her other mother.

Tishani Doshi

9.12.96 walking into a coffee house, I overheard one man tell another that

My father is in the kitchen making lasagna, but I know without asking that he will not have remembered to make a corner without meat, and I guess it takes more than four years of vegetarianism to make my parents forget they raised a carnivorous daughter. He hugs me, inquires after school, my grades, my hair, which is red this month. It occurs to me to tell him I have missed him, but instead I say, "I like your hair, too," even though I don't. Every summer he gets it all cut off into a buzz, which is fine for some people, but then we have to start calling him a sperm whale again. In seventh grade oceanography I learned that a sperm whale's forehead takes up a third of its body, and my father, besides having a prominent forehead, has a receding hairline. The name has stuck.

When I ask where Mom is he squints out the window over the sink for several moments, then shrugs his shoulders. "I think she's out there gardening somewhere." It is both comical and touching, this yearly ritual of my mother's, of pounding the cracked, red Carolina clay with all manner of sharp objects, and filling the dents with seeds she prays will grow, but won't.

I see her before I ever reach the door that opens on our backyard. My mother, whom I expected to find dirty and chatty, is pale and curled in sleep on the couch downstairs. In the odd half-light filtering through the shades she seems nearly translucent, a fish's belly or an old woman's hand, in her worn cotton gown that is no color but a memory of pink. I am used to her made-up forty-something face, not this sweet moonface so naked and pale. I sit on the coffee table, surprised, and watch the gentle rise and fall of her chest, think what I wouldn't give to know where we go when we sleep. Just further inside ourselves, or some place higher, or are we nothing, for a while, having been just one thing for so long? Are we our same selves when we sleep? Faces look so different then, people you know well look so far away, so separate, and you know that if you woke them and asked where they'd been, and they told you, you could never get there, it's the one place they can go that you can't get to.

She's a large woman, my mother. Her arms hang from her gown like fleshy pillows, mapped with the long, shiny bumps of her scars like braille. They all look nearly the same, they are all variations of one another, the ones on her neck like the ones on her legs, and then her face without a mark.

The way my mother met my father

was like a movie, or a novel. She was nineteen and it was July. She and her best friend borrowed two guys' motorcycles and rode up to 7-Eleven for drinks. When my mother went to put the brakes on, she accidentally put it in gear instead, and the bike jerked forward, jumped up onto the sidewalk with her still on it.

She lost control and the bike rammed into the ice machine, flipped once, and landed on its side. She flew headfirst through the plate glass window of the convenience store. Inside she lay on the floor, shredded, her torn flesh filled with shards of glass. My father was a twenty-one-year-old mechanic standing in line to buy a candy bar and a Coke.

In his version he tells how even bloodied as she was, she had the prettiest face he'd ever seen, how he tore his shirt into strips to bandage her until the ambulance came, how he called all the hospitals until he found her . . . *When he tells the story, his voice in my mind gives rise to pictures, and I try to see how they were then, my mother, her hair a long, bleached sheath of silk, did she lie there a still, pale reed in the crimson pool, and did he start to love her then?*. . . how he sent a rose every day until she was well, and how, one warm morning in July a year later, she married him. It took nearly five hundred stitches in all.

Long after dinner is over, long after my parents have gone to bed, I wander through the dark, silent house that I have lived in for so many years, for so long that the creakings and groanings which in my childhood were burglars one night became a sort of music I missed when I was gone. A light like a small flame draws me to the den, where a single lamp gives a dim, red glow, and strange, beautiful shadows move on the walls. I like it here, where it is silent, and the breeze is cool through the screen. I throw some cushions on the floor, stretch out on my back, flip the TV on, which bathes me in a flickering purple light.

. . . and I try to see how they were then, my mother, her hair a long, bleached sheath of silk, did she lie there a still, pale reed in the crimson pool, and did he start to love her then?

On PBS there is a National Geographic special on winged insects. I turn the sound down low and burrow into the soft cocoon of my quilt. A hand comes onto the screen, on the flat palm are five small jewels, five ladybugs, but different— red, pink, yellow, green, orange. How good of them to come in so many colors. The program shifts to a field of goldenrod, and when the narrator begins walking slowly through that brightness, an orange cloud rises, the butterflies, the bright fans of their wings carry them over the meadow, a hundred-thousand breathing suns. The man stops speaking, just stands there— is he naming them over and over in his mind, is he feeling blessed?

I know it is my father who has come in when I see him reflected in the television glass, and anyway, no one else's footsteps in this house are so heavy. I lie quiet in my surprise, consider pretending to be asleep for no reason, but he only settles himself onto the one cushion I left on the couch. Do I mind if he watches with me, mom is snoring and he can't get back to sleep. What can I say? In the air between us, where distance was once an easy journey, there is this thickness. I tell him that's fine Daddy, would he like me to change the channel, but he's fine, he's fine. I turn back to the screen, where a luna moth the size of my hand is spread against a tree branch. It jolts me, almost instinctively I turn my head to ask if he remembers that time, but why would he, and I turn away, oh, it has stayed with me for so long.

The particular sadness of my father's life is that he never knows what part of himself to give, and so always is giving the wrong things. I'd come home from school one day with terrible news. My fourth-grade teacher had assigned us bug collections; twenty insects mounted in four rows on styrofoam backing, and both the scien-

tific and common names stuck on with labels beneath them. The height of the tragedy concerned the stick pins. We were to secure each bug to the backboard by inserting a stick pin into its thorax, and, thus impaled, they were made fast.

We lived a different life then, in a discolored white house surrounded by a field of golden weeds I swore were wheat. The dirty stink of chicken farms, the scent of clover and mimosa, the red earth, that sweet, naked smell that poulticed away the restlessness of so many barefoot summer days. Bugs we had a-plenty. I would climb a mimosa after lunch and not come down until dinner, watch a grand-daddy-long-legs dance the fronds of those leaves for nearly an hour, amazed at the jointed hairs, the spindles that were his legs, and the tiny raisin of his body directing so much machinery. And in the crook of that same branch, innumerable worms would have set up camp, sleeping away the hot, yellow days in a tent of translucent silk which was the labor of their bodies.

It was an old house, with old, hard floors which always creaked with cold and made the curls of your toes shudder. My mother never could dust away the film of brown, forgotten living which seemed to cover everything. So for hours I sifted through the shells of old bodies which littered the window sills— mass graves of powdery-winged insects and shiny, horn-rimmed beetles with plain shells. Some of their names I found in an old book of my grandfather's, the rest invented. Pinned in their neat little rows, each a dull variation of brown, they were testament to what would become a fierce and defiant love for the natural world, and the place of the living in it. I finished the whole thing in one night, and stood it against a wall in the living room, not due yet for another two weeks.

Pinned in their neat little rows, each a dull variation of brown, they were testament to what would become a fierce and defiant love for the natural world, and the place of the living in it.

That same night after dinner we sprawled on the couch and floor— my parents, my younger brother and sister, and I. In the half-dark, half-light of dusk, the glow of the TV painted our faces intermittently blue and bright. I don't know what it was, perhaps the sound of a passing car, a hound howl, but I turned my face to the open window and there it was, clinging to the screen. The thing was huge, and light itself, nearly phosphorescent, its bird-like wings the palest green, great feathers of antennae, and its whole thick body awash in the brightest powder. It was amazing, it was beautiful, it just clung there, and I must have stared that way for ten minutes before my father noticed, looked at my face, at the screen, rose and went outside. When he called me into the kitchen, I went silently, felt my throat closing, the bitter acid of my mouth, my chest so heavy as I faced him. He held its wings pinched between his fingers, the white legs moved wildly on the twisting, monstrous body, and I was silent, I did not say anything, I watched in horror and fascination as he lowered the luna moth into a jar of alcohol, held it there until it stopped twitching, fluttered, and was still. He put the lid on and I could not bear his face full of tenderness and expectation.

She never gave any explanation as to why I'd come upon her sleeping in the middle of the day, but afterwards, I knew, I realized my mother was so weary, that what had really happened was I'd come upon her in the middle of her life.

See, the way my father met my mother was she came flying through a window into his life, like a light, so beautiful he could never let her go, like a light, so beautiful he could never let her go again.

Tell me what we are supposed to love.

Ashley Capps

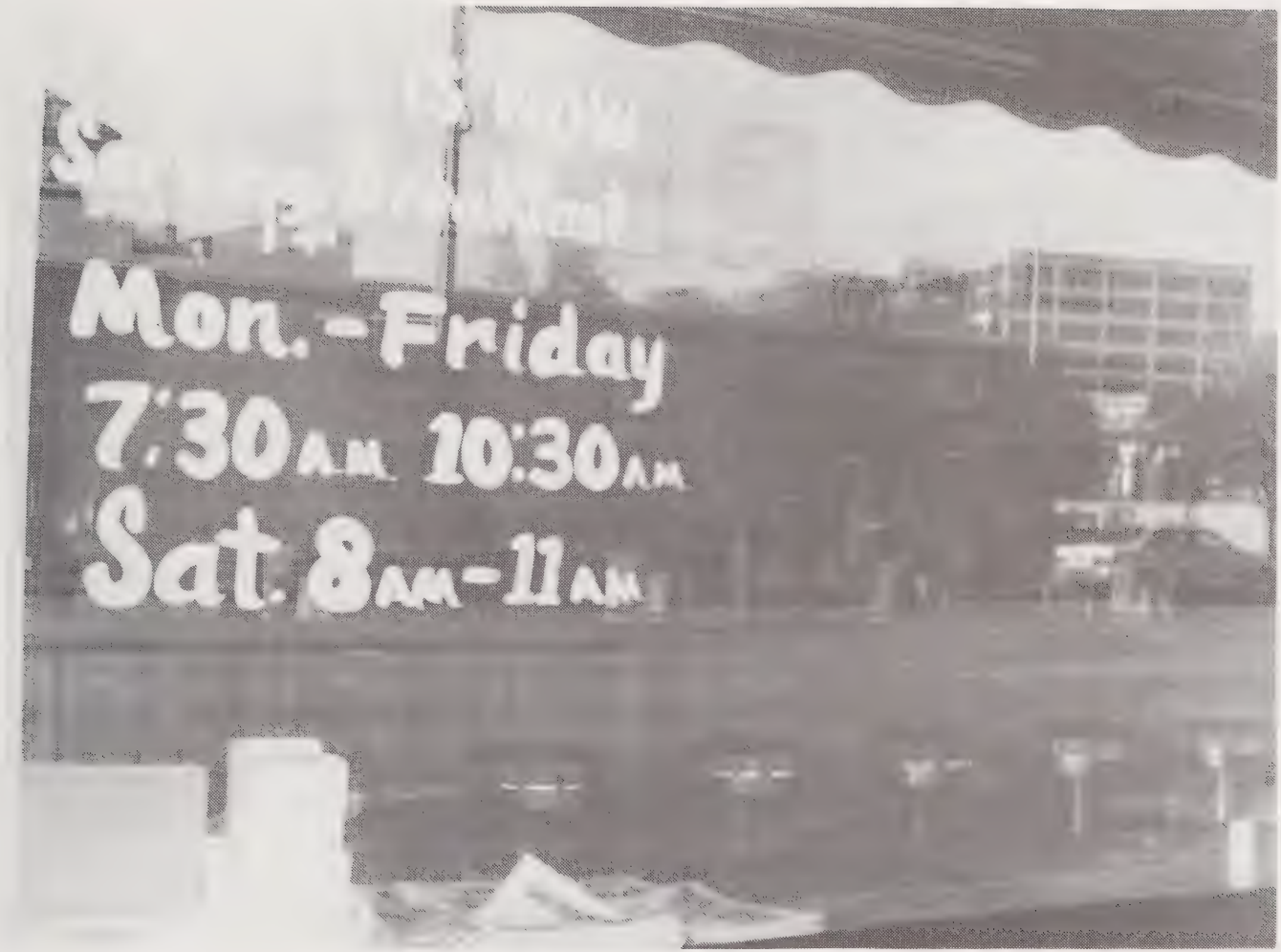
please pass the spice of life

talking about death
around the dinner table
over green peas and meatloaf

"don't you think
she looked blue?"
commented one --
noting the poor lighting
in "places like that"
another said
"i think she looked
like a little mummy" --
a fitting description
for the previously alive and beloved--

there was strawberry shortcake
for dessert

brooke albert



Saturday gelatin silver print *Brooks Thomas*

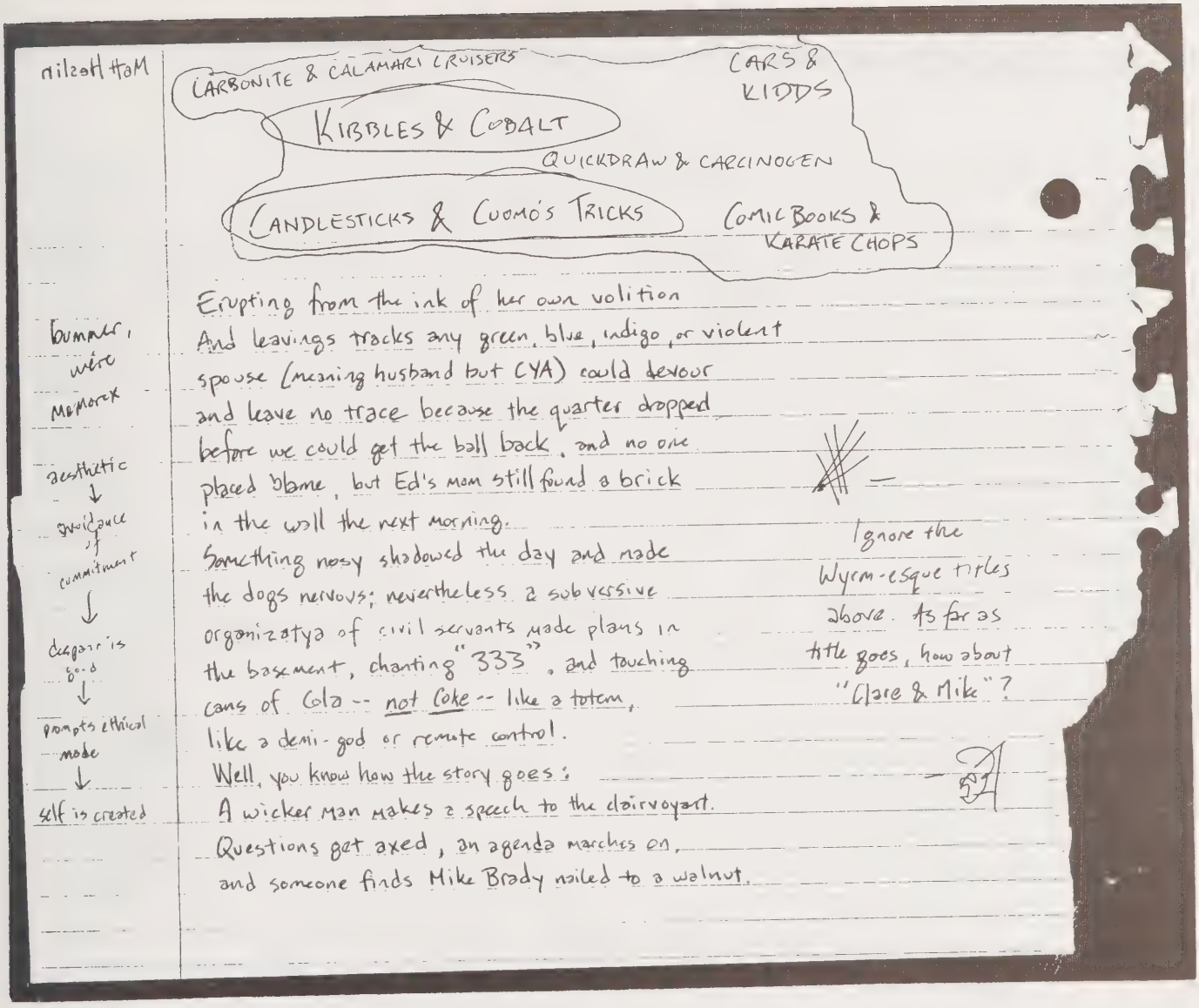
Giving Blood

I pledged to give blood
Lady in White plunged and missed
Missed and plunged
The point; my veins
shrunk away into fine-tipped
Streams scribbled in maps
Where state lines and bold-faced
Cities mock them and the Lady,
She gave me a sticker that
Thanked me for trying.

I pledged to give blood
Lady With Pen slashed and severed
Severed and slashed
My blues with red ink; my poem
Waned into fine-tipped
Screams silenced in sleep
Where tossing only makes
You sore in the morning and the Lady,
She gave me a letter that
Thanked me for dying.

Ingrid Jungermann

this made my night. am12 9.23.96 coltrane would have turned seventy


nilzeH HaM
CARBONITE & CALAMARI CRUISERS
CARS & KIDDS
KIBBLES & COBALT
QUICKDRAW & CARCINOGEN
CANDLESTICKS & CUOMO'S TRICKS
COMIC BOOKS & KARATE CHOPS
Erupting from the ink of her own volition
And leavings tracks any green, blue, indigo, or violent
spouse (meaning husband but CYA) could devour
and leave no trace because the quarter dropped
before we could get the ball back, and no one
placed blame, but Ed's mom still found a brick
in the wall the next morning.
Something nosy shadowed the day and made
the dogs nervous; nevertheless a subversive
organizatya of civil servants made plans in
the basement, chanting "333", and touching
cans of Cola -- not Coke -- like a totem,
like a demi-god or remote control.
Well, you know how the story goes:
A wicker man makes a speech to the dairvoyant.
Questions get axed, an agenda marches on,
and someone finds Mike Brady nailed to a walnut.
human, were Morlock
aesthetic
avoidance of commitment
disgust is good
prompts ethical mode
self is created
Ignore the Wyrm-esque titles above. As far as title goes, how about "Clare & Mike"?

Clare & Mike ink on notebook paper *Matt Heslin*

When Lucy Has an Affair with Professor Forester

I'm losing my pants
Intense
Like the fire in my loins
It shines with an evil
Light.

Miss Ellie
Stubborn as a mule
In her favorite muu muu.
Jock-o is a wacko
In a mental hospital.
Ray's hair is Brill-o.
Where's Lucy? (oh, she just needs to loosen up)

It's kind of
Moist
In there
That hound dog face.

What's wrong with you, boy?

DrForesterwasTexasbornandbredyetmanagedsomehowtosuggestafaintViennese accentinhisspeech.

Blink.

today. keep resting well soulful genius. am I? 10.7.96 came back-she is

and Miss Ellie Attends the Oil Baron's Ball

Five years later
When Froggy went a-courtin':
Would you like a drink?
He fucked your sister.
Smirk for me.

Miss Ellie wears a sequinned muu muu
To avoid marinating in her own urine.
Lucy recovered from the kidnapping quickly
(She's short but she's a model).

In a potent moment
the scene is silent.
Miss Ellie dons a tuxedo.
Dance with it, smell it,
Wear more make-up and look like Sue Ellen.
A whale beached in the sun (purple is not her color),
Can her catheter fit under those muu muu pants?

I wish I had some sugar for you, Jock.
Steal me away.
Rub in that lotion and forget Farraday.

Damn.
They don't dick around in Dallas.

Meredith Malkmus

doing big crosses with t's and b's. many boxes. mind wants to storm right. feels

Musings on Winslow Homer's Painting of a Woman and an Ocean

A light on the sea --
She is trying to seduce the green fire,
she is playing
Her untranslatable love to the moon.

She probably didn't plan it,
was just walking
barefoot when the water
suddenly kissed her like a lover,
and the jadestone sky
and the seasalt smell
and the silence were too much.

What is this mute, green dance?
What does it feel like,
the awkward spinning,
wildly naming the bright bone of the body?

Ashley Capps

like big explosion has taken place inside. outside is trying to focus. appear to

Untitled gelatin silver print *Amy Bache*

Deshawn

'A man is just a man.
But a son, well,
that's somebody,'
Toni said.
I became more
a woman
comforting his
mother –
slumped on the heavy
black velour
couch
big breast heaving
sob filled grieving
white tissue
mercilessly
knotted round thumb
and forefinger.

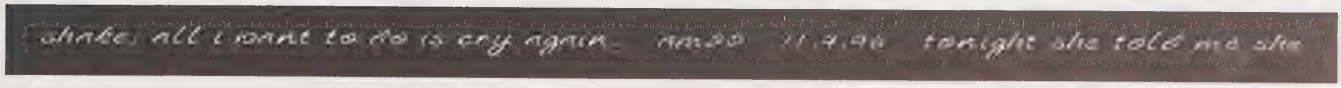
Or when a
sister calls to
admit
her pretty brown
bounced – for good,
well;
you leave
work,
school,
home,
your own
pretty brown
one
and go.
Support
when
native sons die
and
men don't.

Jackie Montgomery

Spark an unlined retreat

I-want-to-be-home red walks
away from
tread-in-brown-work here.
I unclip all the pinnings
of flying fast and loose
with the halted shove.
Every motion carries - cones will not lift -
and pulls the strings from openings
toward mechanics I wish not to meet dancing.
And distractions - I cringe in wood now.
See sway?
What I notice about the
maddeningly windowed twilight
is that I am but a moment whistle
on the yellow wind,
and the gap between my digits
and my slow pride
is rotten to the root
of a core push on swing.

Katherine Furler



Trife Life

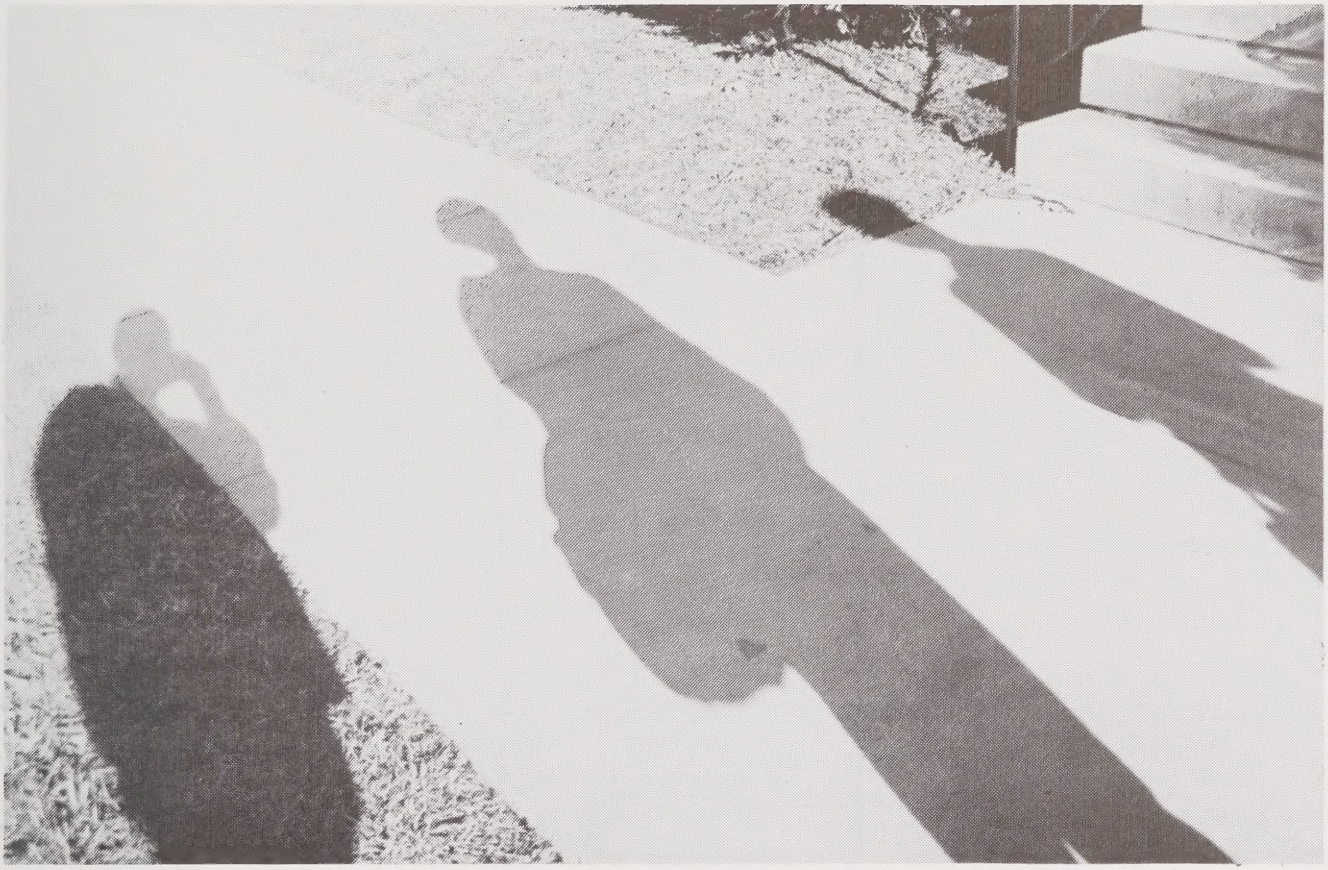
Brothas
is wild out here
stomp around
big as
you please.
Scared
of being
of not being,
of not knowing
how
to be really real,
or legit.

Feeling a wretched
halfness --
the only thing that
ever connected
was organisms
it took
to make
them be
(that's what started it all)
--No one
to
teach how to make it
over
so

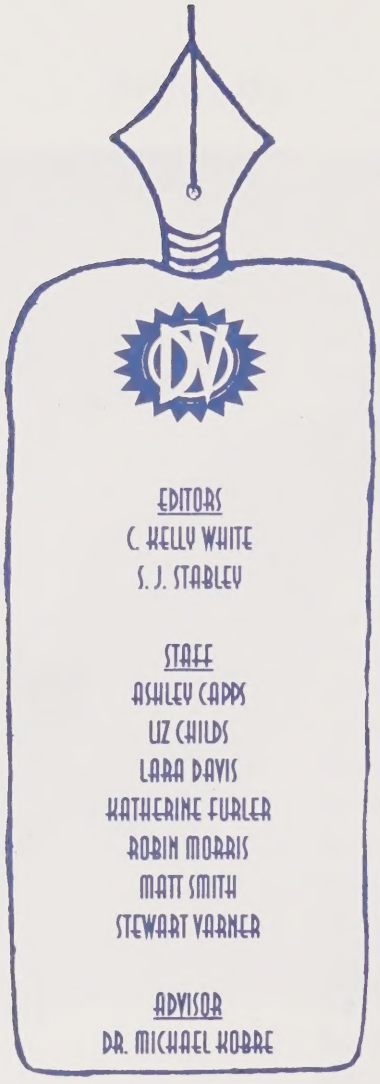
All they know
is
get over:
get kids
get pussy
get missin'
get mines
get money
get locked
get killed
I'm seein'
feelin'
The cycle's
viciousness,
ugliness
their powerlessness
to learn legal life
solo
Meanwhile,
lovin'
you
watchin' you
hurt you
and
'bout to
get hurt.

Jackie Montgomery

was seeing someone else. nuclas 1-3-97 the gods reassure me they possess



Five o'clock, Tuesday Afternoon gelatin silver print *Lara Davis*



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grand senses of humor.-Ched Lohr